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HIGH SCHOOL ENROLLMENTS IN LATIN, 1964-65.

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A MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION (MLA) STATISTICAL SURVEY SHOWS THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS STUDYING FRENCH, SPANISH, GERMAN, OR LATIN IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS DURING EACH SCHOOL YEAR FROM 1958-59 TO 1964-65, THE PERCENTAGE STUDYING EACH LANGUAGE IN RELATION TO THE TOTAL HIGH SCHOOL POPULATION, AND THE PERCENTAGE STUDYING LATIN IN RELATION TO THE TOTAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENROLLMENT. THE DATA REVEAL A CONTINUOUS DECLINE IN THE STUDY OF LATIN IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS, AS COMPARED TO THE STUDY OF THE OTHER THREE LANGUAGES, AND POINTS TO, AMONG OTHER THINGS, A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING AMONG STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND PARENTS OF THE CULTURAL VALUES OF CLASSICAL STUDIES FOR THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING STUDENT. WHAT IS STRONGLY URGED IS THE KIND OF NATION-WIDE "PUBLIC RELATIONS" PROGRAM THAT THE MLA LAUNCHED IN 1952 ON BEHALF OF MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN "THE CLASSICAL WORLD," VOLUME 59, NUMBER 9, MAY 1966. (GJ)

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Is Latin dead?

Many, many years ago Latin students used to chant with wry humor:

> Latin is a language dead as it can be;
> First it killed the Romans and now its killing me.

In those dim, distant days this was funny because Latin was so widely studied that we could afford to laugh.

Today, however, the numbers and the humor

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are departing from the field of Latin. Today a much more serious refrain might go as follows:

Latin is a language dying by degree;
First it dies percentage-wise and now numerically.

And there is unfortunately a great deal more truth than poetry to this.

Below (Table I) are the latest statistics furnished by the Modern Language Association on the number of students studying Latin and the three leading modern languages in public high schools in the United States (Grades 9-12) for the post-Sputnik years of 1958-59 through 1964-65; the percentage studying each language in relation to total high school population; and separately, the percentage of students studying Latin in relation to the total foreign languages ("FL") generally.

What are the reasons for this startling decline, especially the last two years, of a language that every learned person used to consider a *sine qua non?* There are a few rather obvious ones: the Depression and World War II and the sharp decrease in modern language study from 25.2% of total public high school enrollment in 1928 to 19.5% in 1934 to 13.7% in 1948; the same conditions and the even sharper decrease of study of Latin from 22% in 1928 to 16% in 1934 to 7.8% in 1948; the large number of guidance counselors, administrators, supervisors, and even colleagues who, not having had Latin, do not know its values and therefore adopt either a passive attitude toward it or mount an active attack on it; and most recently the decrease and even elimination of Latin in the Sacraments and the Mass of the Roman Catholic Church and the resultant misconception that Latin is on the way out completely in the Church.

But I believe that the most important reason for this sad state of affairs is the lack of any concerted, nation-wide *public relations program* to call to the attention of students, parents, and educators the value of Latin for a true education and cultural experience. Ever since May 1962, this writer, alerted by the percentage decrease in Latin enrollment, has been addressing written and oral pleas to the American Classical League and to other classical societies to mount such a campaign, but seemingly to no avail. Latin has been, or is now being, "phased out" of innumerable public high schools. Where it is still strong it is usually so more because of a personality cult than a cultural desire.

Even though I begin to feel like Cassandra and thus to fear dire results, let me once more, from this new rostrum, urge, beg, implore—let others do the demanding—that the newly established national office and its director, Dr. John F. Latimer, and its deputy director, Dr. John C. Williams, formulate and *undertake* this coming year a strong, determined, wide-spread public relations program to bring to the attention of the United States the values of Latin for high school students and the decrease in the proficiency in English since the decrease in the study of Latin. Such a program on the part of the Modern Language Association, beginning in 1952, helped restore foreign language entrance requirements in colleges and reverse dramatically the status of foreign language study long before Sputnik in 1957.

Just as I am certain that the statistics for the current school year will show a further decline in Latin, so am I certain that, unless such a program is undertaken, in a very few years the answer to that disturbing, provocative

TABLE I

	Spanish	French	German	Latin	Latin :: FL
1958-59	691,024 8.8%	479,769 6.1%	93,054 1.2%	617,500 7.8%	32.2%
1959-60	802,266 9.8%	603,733 7.4%	123,581 1.5%	639,776 7.8%	28.5%
1960-61	935,418 10.8%	747,486 8.6%	151,261 1.7%	661,563 7.6%	25.9%
1961-62	1,054,730 11.4%	908,082 9.8%	184,820 2.0%	695,297 7.5%	24.0%
1962-63	1,141,865 11.5%	1,018,097 10.3%	213,425 2.2%	728,637 7.4%	23.1%
1963-64	1,336,105 12.4%	1,130,987 10.6%	260,488 2.4%	680,291 6.3%	19.4%
1964-65	1,362,831 12.3%	1,194,991 10.8%	285,613 2.6%	590,047 5.3%	14.0%

question at the top of this article will be generally "Yes."*

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